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U.S. Seems More Willing To Support Insurgencies

Funding for Anticommunists Gains on Hill

First of two articles

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The Reagan administration, supported and sometimes prodded by a broad range of congressmen and senators, appears increasingly willing to give direct aid to anticommunist and antileftist insurgencies in many parts of the Third World.

So far the support for these insurgencies is largely rhetorical, and the record of U.S. aid delivery is confused and contradictory—and probably incomplete, because the public record does not include all covert operations. But a chorus of administration speeches has begun to generate a flurry of independent papers, hearings, arguments and legislative efforts that could presage a wider shift in public attitude.

"We must not break faith with those who are risking their lives—on every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua—to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth," President Reagan said in his last State of the Union address. Similar messages have been repeated by numerous senior officials in Reagan's administration.

Congress, departing from its recent history of opposing U.S. involvement in messy Third World conflicts, appears surprisingly eager to help. Democrats in Congress have actively pushed for overt aid to rebels in communist-ruled Cambodia and Afghanistan.

Two Republican senators have proposed setting up a special office in the White House to coordinate U.S. aid to insurgent groups rising against Soviet-backed governments in the Third World, from Indochina to southern Africa to Central America.

Other suggestions would make aid an overt program by switching control over it from the Central Intelligence Agency to the Defense Department.

But some officials worry that too formal a doctrine might cramp their flexibility, which now permits contradictory behavior in different cases. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that real content is slowly being given to a policy that is still more sentiment than substance.

The idea of "revolutionary democracy" seems to be catching on, in spite of—or perhaps because of—the fact that it has not yet been precisely defined.

The "Reagan doctrine," former United Nations ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick said at a May 10 luncheon, "states the case for the moral superiority of democratic institutions," a superiority that is "nothing short of revolutionary" for "freedom fighters . . . defending themselves against incorporation into a great warrior empire."

"The American people have a long and noble tradition of supporting the struggle of other peoples for freedom, democracy and independence," Secretary of State George P. Shultz said in a recent article in Foreign Affairs magazine. "If we turned our backs on this tradition, we would be conceding the Soviet notion that communist revolutions are irreversible while everything else is up for grabs."

Shultz's statement reflected one of the roots of this development: conservatives' longstanding irritation at what they call U.S. passivity in the face of an active Soviet drive to foment revolution and win allies worldwide. In the 1970s, several have said, frustration soared over Soviet gains in the Third World and over the apparent reliance on covert action alone as a response.

"The '70 United States reliability," tional Secretary responded to the question of whether he called insurgencies "demned cover a trend of movement." "There is no longer trend of movement."

William Casev said, "There are insurgencies fighting leftist governments in all the countries Casev mentioned, plus Laos, Mozambique and Vietnam. Overtly, at least, the Reagan administration has moved as cautiously as any of its predecessors in providing aid, but it is starting its praise for the new insurgencies at the enthusiastic level that it took years to attain for antigovernment rebels in Nicaragua."

The West, he added, need not match this Soviet effort: "Oppressed people want freedom and are fighting for it. They need only modest support . . . from nations which want to see freedom prevail."

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When U.S. officials first sought to justify helping the Nicaraguan contra (counterrevolutionary) forces in 1981, they did not say much to Congress about the goals of the insurgents or the need to remove Marxist-Leninists from the Nicaraguan government. Instead, they cited only a tactical need: to stop Nicaragua from aiding leftist guerrillas in El Salvador, where the Reagan administration had inherited a substantial American commitment to a government threatened by left-wing rebellion.

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